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Written on September 22, 2016 at 7:00 pm by [Navy Medicine](#)

[Why Suicide Prevention Holds a Special Place in My Heart](#)

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By Capt. Dale White, chaplain of Navy Medicine

The surgeon general often reminds me to ask people why.

Why are they a part of Navy Medicine? Why are they coming for help? That's something that really resonates with me: the why.

Suicide prevention has a very near and dear place in my heart. For me, my passion in suicide prevention starts with my why.



In 2000, my father was caring for my mother, who was recovering post cancer, when he died suddenly. One of the hardest things in life is to cope with the loss of a parent or loved one. That was truly evident with my brother, who was so close to my dad and took our father's death very hard.

After our father's death, my brother started to drink excessively. I confronted him about the drinking, but if I had taken the time to look at all the other warning signs, that confrontation would have happened differently. Maybe I didn't want to see his depression because he's my brother.

Three weeks after confronting him, my brother intentionally overdosed and his heart just stopped.

It happened on my 40th birthday.

There is not a year that goes by that I don't remember my brother. He is my why.

I have a deep passion for my work with suicide prevention. As a professional Navy chaplain I am intensely involved in making sure our folks are going to training, making sure that every Sailor has access to the care they need. There are some young Sailors whose shipmates are going through the same challenges that my brother did. They're manifesting those warning signs and people don't see it. We can't do enough to support them and show we care.



I keep a picture of my brother readily visible in my home. It reminds me that this is real. Suicide prevention is not just a theme. It's not just a Department of the Navy or

Department of Defense program. Real people are taking their lives. Real people are feeling this sense of hopelessness and it could be any one of us.


My brother and I grew up in a caring family and it hit us. It can hit anyone. It's real and it never goes away. I'll never get over not having my older brother. You always think what could I have done differently or what would he be doing today? He would have turned 59 this year.

That's why suicide prevention is so important. If a life is lost, the impact is wide and it lasts forever. I'll never stop doing anything I can do to share my experience, train our Sailors, and look out for my shipmates. I've been doing this for 25 years and every time I'm on leave I take my phone. When someone is in need, they're in need right now. Not tomorrow, not in an hour, right now. I've told our ministry team that this is first priority. We're going to stop everything and we're going to take care of them. It's all about delivering that message of compassion, hope and trust to reduce the stigma for Sailors seeking support.

We're a family here. We need to take care of each other like family. Every single one of us needs to be looking out for our shipmates. There are so many resources for suicide prevention but the best resource is leadership, and each of us is a leader in our own small frame of reference. Recognize the warning signs; if you see something, say something. Do something and save a life.


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4 Comments

1.  *Christianne Witten* says:
[September 23, 2016 at 9:17 pm](#)

Thanks for sharing this personal story, Chaps.

[Reply](#)

2.  *Brenton "Chad" Asbury* says:
[September 26, 2016 at 10:49 am](#)

Very touching and good word, Chaps. Thank you for caring like you do, and inspiring others to do the same.

[Reply](#)

3.  *Bill Hutchinson* says:
[September 28, 2016 at 8:42 am](#)

I'm about the same age as your brother would be today. I've had my own struggles with TBI, alcohol, "substances", drugs-both prescribed and illicit, etc., Grew up in a "good" home, with loving parents. BUT, there was alcoholism in my home, which wasn't recognized back then for the subtle damage done and alcohol's role in my dysfunctional family. My Dad abused me when I was a kid, and the abuse was most damaging in verbal, emotional, and psychological areas. "DENIAL" was a huge factor in my families coping skills, and relationships. And it was only after years of excellent psychological therapy that I could work things out. Working the 12 Steps helped greatly, also. And yes, I survived my own suicidality, and have healed from that. Looking at, and working through, guilt & shame was key to undoing my own "hopelessness". And, yes, Yoga, Tai Chi, and Mindfulness Meditation helped very much. It's not just the "mind", or brain, but it's ALL areas & parts of the body that are involved. While we need to acknowledge our strengths, we also need to pay more attention to our support networks, and to learn to look outside ourselves, to share our healing journeys. The best way to BE helped, is to reach out TO help. Thank-you, Capt. White!